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NEA/PD FOR FRANK FINVER

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TAGS: OPRC PREL PGOV KPAO PTER IZ EG

SUBJECT: MUBARAK REACTS TO PRESS SPECULATION ON POLICY

TOWARD HAMAS - U.S.

Classified By: Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone for Reasons
1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Presidential Advisor Soliman Awaad phoned Ambassador June 15 to convey President Mubarak's personal disavowal of an unattributed accusation reported that day in the influential weekly magazine al-Musawwar. The article (text below) reports last month's visit to the U.S. by the Egyptian Council on Foreign Relations, during which they reportedly heard private Americans accuse Egypt of aiding the Hamas election victory "in order to teach the Americans a lesson about democracy in the Arab world." Awaad reported that Mubarak wanted the U.S. to know that the accusations were baseless and illogical. The Ambassador assured Awaad that we knew that Egypt on the contrary had pressed to postpone the PA elections. (Comment: While such tendentious and crude reporting does not rise above the usual background noise of Egyptian media, Mubarak's personal sensitivity about this report -- in what he knows we view as GOE controlled media -- is notable. End Comment.)

¶2. (U) Reporting on the recent U.S. visit by the Egyptian Council on Foreign Relations, delegation member Muhammad Wahby claimed that "think-tank" members suggested that Egypt had supported the victory of Hamas in the Palestinian elections as a way to discourage the U.S. Administration's pro-democracy policy. Wahby contended that Egypt seemed to have been put in a no-win situation with American politicians: on one hand, Egypt was being charged with helping Hamas come to power; but on the other hand, some said that if Egypt had wanted to prevent Hamas from coming to power, its failure to do so was a sign of its declining influence and value to the U.S.

¶3. (U) Translation of excerpts of the Wahby article in al-Musawwar weekly, dated June 16, p. 24, entitled "Mission Impossible in America":

"...perhaps the strangest thing that the delegation heard was what was said in a meeting with the leaders of one of the most important (American) political research institutes... accusing Egypt of having helped to bring about the success of Hamas in taking power over the Palestinian Authority, by affording it the equal treatment it accorded to Fatah in the negotiations that it had organized between the two sides. When the Egyptian delegation refuted these claims, an even stranger riposte ensued, saying that if Egypt had really wanted to keep Hamas from taking power, then the (election) outcome is a serious failure for Egypt and is proof of its shrinking role in the region. However, (they then said) if it is indeed the case that Egypt had helped Hamas to control the Palestinian Authority, with the objective of frightening America away from its policy of promoting democracy in the region - just as (Egypt allegedly) had done with the Muslim Brothers by letting them run in the parliamentary elections in spite of the fact that they were a banned group - then it would be difficult to continue to view Egypt as an ally of America, which provides Egypt with military and economic assistance in excess of USD 1.7 billion dollars annually.

In fact, the delegation rejected these illogical allegations, yet they were echoed in some meetings we had with some of the key research centers and think tanks.... In sum, there was a campaign to spread about whatever could belittle Egypt's importance to America. A report by the U.S. GAO, which had been submitted to the Congress, was (also) used for this purpose. That report focused on whether American security assistance to Egypt really serves American foreign and security policy.

Of course, the delegation refuted the basis of this report in all its meetings. Repercussions of these charges were felt in the hostile campaign led by Representative David Obey, who reneged on his friendship with Egypt and called for cutting two hundred million dollars from military assistance to Egypt, in order to punish Egypt for backpedaling on political reform...."

RICCIARDONE